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ANNUAL CONGRESS OF THE SOCIETY OF SOCIAL ECONOMY, AT
PARIS, MAY 29 TO JUNE 4.

The somewhat unfavorable condition of economic studies in France during the last twenty years makes the annual reunions of the Le Play societies of social economy of special interest and importance, as indicating a vivifying influence which is rapidly leading the science in that country into fruitful channels, and which, as it seems, is destined to bring French economic thought into closer touch with modern social and industrial movements. Its effect is already being felt in all directions and the young workers, who have adopted the principles of this school, will, in time, raise the standard of economic studies in France, to their former enviable position.

The Congress of the *Société d'Économie Sociale*, for the year 1893, while meeting upon exactly the same principles as its predecessors, differed quite materially from them in the nature of the subjects treated. One of the predominant features of the former reunions has been studies in economic history; the Congress of 1893, however, found so many subjects of urgent present interest before them, that, for the time being, papers on economic history were relegated to a second place. The activity in all lines of social work in France, which, though unostentatious, is none the less effective, offered a great wealth of material for interesting reports and communications. The usual division into general and special sessions (*Réunions de Travail*) was maintained; the former confining themselves to questions of more general interest, the latter to special topics, which offered opportunity for more intimate exchange of opinions and more thorough discussion. To begin with the general sessions, we may mention the following:

1. "*Of the change in the conception of law and justice from the standpoint of social economy*," by the President of the Congress, M. E. Glasson.—Herein the progress in industrial and moral conditions was carefully summarized. With this progress the evils which have accompanied progress, were contrasted. The agricultural crisis, the languishing condition of commerce and industry, the heavy burdens imposed on the citizen through taxation, were duly noticed. But special stress was laid upon the gradual undermining of moral conditions; the precarious condition of family institutions, the menace to private property, a shallow materialism which seems to dominate such large classes of society, combined with a personal egotism, which ignores all the higher interests of society. An examination of the causes, which have contributed to this unsatisfactory state of affairs, and the measures which might lead to the amelioration of the same, followed. The causes are, certainly, numerous, and it is of

special importance to emphasize the fact that they are to be found rather in the nature of man than in the weakness of institutions. The weakening of the moral sense, the degeneration of character, the widespread ignorance of the principles of right and justice, and of a sound social science; all these are the real sources of our present social uneasiness. The very vagueness of most of the plans for social reform, seeking, as they do, to gratify very doubtful aspirations of the masses, shows the insufficiency of their moral basis. The speaker disclaimed any intention of attempting a rehabilitation of natural laws, as sufficient to govern man and society. What he did contend for was that the method of observation of social conditions, as prescribed by Le Play, be as rigidly applied to economic and social science, as it has been done to history and jurisprudence. The comparative study of administration and legislation, should offer us more than the mere commentary on texts. Looked at in this way, social science embraces a vast horizon, examining into the most minute details as well as considering general principles.

With this weakening of the notion of the moral law, the notion of law and order has also suffered. The distinction between laws of public and private interest has too often been lost sight of. The obligation of contracts no longer seems to possess its former absolute inviolability. In concluding, M. Glasson wished it distinctly understood that his somewhat darkly colored description was by no means intended to discourage social effort. He had only taken this course because he felt that sufficient force was available to meet the most important problems. In spite of the uncertainty of the present, there is great hope for the future, and it is from those who most thoroughly understand the true nature of economic and moral laws that society expects the real and lasting impetus.

2. "*The report of the committee upon prizes awarded by the society to honor and recompense family virtues and faithful employees,*" by M. Welche, president of the *Société d'Economie Sociale*.—In this report it was pointed out that the object in view was a two-fold one. On the one hand, the workingman was studied in his private family life, on the other, in his relation to his employer. He then proceeded to recall some of the model industrial enterprises which are, perhaps, more abundant in France than in any other country, and which offered to employees all those encouraging influences which breed mutual confidence and effective services. The most interesting of these is the perfume factory Gellé Lecaron,* where the conditions of the industry, combined with the efforts of the employer, have succeeded in

* This factory is situated at Levallois-Perret, No. 149 Rue du Bois.

establishing conditions, perhaps unique in the industrial world for all that concerns harmony and hearty co-operation. Out of this establishment, as well as from the workshops of the Paris, Lyons and Mediterranean Railway Company, which has also made strenuous efforts to improve the condition of its workingmen, several employees were selected who had distinguished themselves through their faithfulness to family and employer.

3. A communication by M. Le Vicomte de Meaux upon the "*Separation of Church and State in the United States and in France*."—After tracing the history of the relation of Church and State in America, he went on to show how the freedom granted to the Church was favorable to the growth of the Church as well as to the free expansion of the State.

4. M. Delaire, general secretary of the *Société d'Economie Sociale* made the usual report upon the work done during the year by the central and branch societies. Amongst the "*monographs*" published under the direction of the society during the year the following may be mentioned :

- a. "*The Familière of Guise.*"
- b. "*The Cabinet-makers of Paris,*" by M. du Maroussem.
- c. "*A Texan Ranch,*" by M. Claudio Jannet.
- *d. "*The Doll-head and Hand Industry of Paris,*" by M. du Maroussem.
- e. "*The Tanners of Malmedy,*" by M. Ernest Dubois.
- f. "*The Silk Weavers of Southern Italy,*" by M. Santangelo Spoto.
- g. "*The Workingmen of the Co-operative Paper Factories of Angoulême,*" and others.

After recalling the courses of lectures given by the society in its own building, and under its auspices at the law school of Paris, and the work done in foreign countries along the lines indicated by the society and representing the principles they advocate, the secretary closed his report with an appeal to the continued co-operation of all members.

5. "*The report of the jury for the award of prizes for family monographs.*"—After recalling the somewhat pessimistic tone of most of the monographs submitted and the unfortunate condition of many of the trades selected for treatment, he proceeded to award the first prize to M. Edouard Fuster for his "*Life of the Berlin Laboring Classes;*" the second prize to M. Paul Lagarde for a monograph upon the "*Vegetable Canning Industries,*" and to M. Henri Decugis for a monograph upon the "*Chesselas Industry of Thomery.*"

The general sessions were brought to a close by two addresses, one by M. Fuster, upon the life of the laboring classes in Berlin ; the

* Commencing with "d" the mentioned monographs have not as yet appeared.

other upon the social rôle of popular instruction in music. The special reunions were devoted to the following topics :

1. M. A. des Cilleuls, upon The Guild and the Physiocrats, during the Eighteenth Century.
2. M. Brants, upon The Guild of Trades and Commerce, organized in 1885.
3. M. Marin, upon The Social Work due to Private Initiative at Geneva.
4. M. Blondel, upon The Recent Progress of Socialism in Germany.
5. M. André Tandonnet upon A Rural Family during the *Ancien Régime*.
6. M. A. Fontaine, Wages and Hours of Work in the Industries in the *Department* of the Seine, using the material furnished by the report of the Bureau of Labor.
7. M. Micolle, upon The Agricultural Co-operative Associations in France.
8. M. Fougerousse, upon The Recent Progress in Consumptive and Productive Co-operation in the Agricultural Industries.
9. M. Louis Batcane, upon The Causes of the Destruction of the Stability of the Family in the Pyrenees.
10. The Question of Employment Bureaus at Paris, by M. Vanleer and M. Henri Desfert.

In addition to these general and special sessions those attending the Congress undertook several excursions to centres of social work, such as the Central Home for the Unemployed, the Night Shelters for Women, the perfume factory of MM. Gellé and Lecaron at Levallois, the establishments of the city of Paris for the purification of sewage; the different institutions of the Paris, Lyons and Mediterranean Railway Company, together with several hospitals and other charitable institutions.

From this review of the proceedings of the Congress, it will readily be seen that whilst the scope and range of the subjects treated differed materially, penetrating into many fields of political, moral and social science; a common substratum can be found upon which all rest. These principles, enunciated by Le Play in his "*Ouvriers européens*," formed the common platform upon which all met and which were taken as the guiding principle for the method of treatment of the varied program. Thus the Congress of 1893 may be looked upon as worthy of its interesting predecessors, and as an adequate exponent of the character of the work done by the *Société d'Économie sociale*.

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Paris, June, 1893.